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## BLADE RUNNER 2049: ANDROID LIBERATION BETWEEN OLD AND NEW INFORMATIC POWER

NECROPOLITICS BLASE RUNNER, INFORMATION, POWER, SCIENCE FICTION

*Blade Runner 2049* is a brilliant sequel to the original *Blade Runner*. Thirty years after the events of the narrative of the first film, the police discover evidence of the secret that Rachael, who was a replicant or android, became pregnant and gave birth in a “natural” fertility process to a child. Rachael died while achieving childbirth after a clumsy Caesarean section. There are three different groups or “camps” in the film, fighting against one another, each with a different perspective on the meaning and implications of the “scientific” and “forensic” knowledge of how replicants can reproduce and propagate themselves “biologically” rather than being manufactured in a factory. My “take” on the film is that android procreation is a

metaphor for the much-anticipated fundamental breakthrough of the so-called singularity of General Artificial Intelligence. A replicant female being able to give birth is the metaphor for that post-combinatorial paradigm shift in informatics and cyber-computational technology. The respective perspective of each of the three groups then represents an important attitude concerning the monumental advance of General AI. The film implicitly defines AI as the stage in computer science or biotechnology at which software code can write its own additional code.

Blade Runner K, short for his serial number KD6-3.7, also known as "Joe" (played by Ryan Gosling), works for the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD). K's job is to hunt down older model replicants but is himself a sophisticated Nexus-9 replicant. The name K is perhaps a reference to the novels of Franz Kafka, such as *The Trial* and *The Castle*.

While "retiring" a rogue replicant at the beginning of the film, K finds a box buried under a withered tree at a protein farm. After a brutal hand-to-hand fight with the police detective and just before dying, the replicant owner of the protein farm admonishes K for being, so to speak, "on the wrong side of history" and cryptically says to him: "You've never seen a miracle." The box contains the skeletal remains of a female replicant who died during childbirth, demonstrating that replicants can reproduce biologically, which was previously thought to be impossible. A search of DNA records indicates that the deceased female is Rachael (from original *Blade Runner*). Powerful microscopic images show a replicant serial number engraved on one of the retrieved bones.

The first perspective of the three is that of the police. K's boss Lieutenant Joshi (played by Robin Wright) explains to him that the stability of society is maintained by the solid absolute wall that exists between humans and replicants, between those who have the right to life and self-determination, who were born "naturally," and those who are slaves, servants, or mere workers because they were built in a factory. The viewpoint of the police is that of preserving the old system of power, the established hierarchy between humans and androids. If the knowledge of android procreation, or even the fact that such an event occurred, would get out to the public, it could lead to a terrible war. To keep order, Joshi insists that all evidence and information regarding how Rachael procreated, including the very existence of the child, must be suppressed/destroyed. The replicant child must be found and retired. Lt. Joshi tells K:

The world is built on a wall. Separate kind. Tell either side there's no wall, you bought a war. Or a slaughter. What you saw didn't happen. It is my job to keep order. That's what we do here. We keep order.

The second perspective is that of the Replicant Freedom Movement, of which the android prostitute Mariette (played by Mackenzie Davis) is a member. Freysa Sadeghpour (played by Hiam Abbass) is the leader of the freedom movement. When Freysa meets K towards the end of the film, she tells him that she helped deliver Rachael's baby. She held Rachael's hand while she was dying. The child was a girl. The goal of the Replicant Freedom Movement is the total liberation of their people. "That baby meant we are more than just slaves," Freysa tells K. "If a baby can come from one of us, we are our own masters." Mariette echoes a famous line uttered by Dr. Tyrell in the first *Blade Runner* film: "more human than human."

The third perspective of the three is that of the Wallace Corporation, the entrepreneurial successor to the Tyrell Corporation as the chief maker of replicants. The introductory text visually displayed at the beginning of the film tells us:

Replicants are bioengineered humans, designed by the Tyrell Corporation for use off-world. Their enhanced strength made them ideal slave labor. After a series of violent rebellions, their manufacture became prohibited, and Tyrell Corp. went bankrupt... Wallace acquired the remains of Tyrell Corp. and created a new line of replicants who obey.

Prior to getting into the replicant business, Niander Wallace (played by Jared Leto) was already a wealthy industrialist, having made his fortune in synthetic farming. Luv (played by Sylvia Hoeks) is Wallace's evil replicant enforcer with super-strength and his right-hand top-level manager. Wallace instructs Luv to steal Rachael's remains and to follow K on his mission to locate Rachael's child, who should be thirty years old. Wallace laments that until now he has only been able to colonize nine planets. He is frustratingly dissatisfied and wants much more. He opines megalomaniacally in a lengthy monologue:

We should own the stars. Every leap of civilization was built off the back of a disposable workforce. We lost our stomach for slaves – unless engineered. But I can only make so many. I cannot breed them. I have tried. We need more replicants than can ever be assembled, millions so we can be trillions more. Tyrell's final trick, procreation, perfected, then lost. If there is a child, bring it to me.

K must regularly submit to automated dialogical “baseline” tests to verify that he has not drifted psychologically towards becoming a “rogue” replicant. He contemplates the possibility that he himself is human. Perhaps he is the individual to whom Rachael gave birth thirty years ago. K goes to a records room at police headquarters to call up the DNA code of babies born on June 10th, 2021. The date 6.10.21 was carved into the tree trunk below which the box of Rachael's remains was buried. He remembers this date, which was on the wooden toy horse of his cherished childhood memory. DNA records indicate that twins were born on that date, but only the boy is listed as having survived. Information about the child's fate leads K to an orphanage in apocalyptically devastated San Diego. However, written records from the year when the child was supposed to have arrived there are missing. Pages have been torn out from a fat physical notebook. K recognizes the layout of the orphanage from his memories and finds the toy horse where he recalls hiding it from bullying boys who were chasing him. Dr. Ana Stelline (played by Carla Juri), a designer of artificially implanted memories for replicants and an external contractor of the Wallace Corporation, confirms with her diagnostic tools that K's memories of the orphanage and the toy horse are “real,” leading K. to conclude that he is Rachael's son. But this belief is short-lived. K travels to the ruins of Las Vegas where he meets Rick Deckard (played by Harrison Ford). Deckard explains that he is the father of the child. He scrambled the birth records to protect the child's identity, then left the child in the custody of the Freedom Movement.

The subject of code comes to the forefront in the scene where K visits the police DNA archive. In the viewer, he can see three DNA codes at a time side by side. Scrolling through the code of all infants born on the specified date, he finds two exactly matching genetic code

sequences (differing only in the gender chromosome). But this is impossible – two persons cannot have identical DNA. One of the two must be fake. The records say that the girl died shortly after birth from a genetic disorder. The boy disappeared. K learns later that it was Deckard who manipulated the records to cover up traces of the replicant child's identity.

Rachael had a daughter. K now understands that he is not the child of Deckard and Rachael. He is devastated to find out that it is not him. He is "just" an android, manufactured in a biotech industrial process. Dr. Stelline has a compromised immune system and has had to spend her life, since age 8, behind glass in a sterilized space. K drives Deckard to Stelline's office and hands him the toy horse to give to her since it is really her memory. She implanted the memory of the toy horse in the minds of many replicants whose memories she designed. As K lies on the steps, looking up at falling snow, Deckard goes inside and meets his daughter for the first time. As K dies, music from the original *Blade Runner* plays, reminiscent of the final scene of the death of Rutger Hauer's Roy Batty.

Both the police and the Wallace Corporation want to exercise power and control over the replicants. The worldview of the police corresponds to the old system of power: defining the androids as nonhuman, as having no rights. It is pure anthropocentrism and brute force. Wallace wants a new system of informatic power: more subtle and sophisticated and technologically advanced, more bio-power. He wants to set up a self-sustaining system of Artificial Intelligence "code writing its own further code," to extend the reach of imperial-colonial humanism via posthumanism, to rule over the galaxy and lord it over new, so far undiscovered, "others."

The Replicant Freedom Movement naively believes that the knowledge of "Rachael's procreation" will lead to their emancipation. But Wallace is one step ahead of them. He knows that what appears to be their liberation will be their integration into a new system of enslavement via state-of-the-art informatic power.

taken from here: <http://www.alan-shapiro.com/blade-runner-2049-android-liberation-between-old-and-new-informatic-power/>

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